

OCR Computer Science A Level

1.2.2 Applications Generation

Advanced Notes



Specification:

1.2.2 a)

- **Nature of applications**

1.2.2 b)

- **Utilities**

1.2.2 c)

- **Open source vs closed source**

1.2.2 d)

- **Translators**
 - Interpreters
 - Compilers
 - Assemblers

1.2.2 e)

- **Stages of compilation**
 - Lexical analysis
 - Syntax analysis
 - Code generation
 - Optimisation

1.2.2 f)

- **Linkers, loaders and use of libraries**



Nature of applications

Software can either be categorised as applications software or systems software.

Applications software

Applications software is designed to be **used by the end-user to perform one specific task**.

Application software requires systems software in order to run.

Examples: *desktop publishing, word processing, spreadsheets, web browsers.*

Systems software

Systems software is **low-level software that is responsible for running the computer system smoothly**, interacting with hardware and generally providing a platform for applications software to run. The user does not directly interact with systems software but it ensures high performance for the user.

Examples: *library programs, utility programs, operating system, device drivers.*

Utilities

Utilities are a key piece of system software integral to ensuring the **consistent, high performance** of the operating system. Each utility program has a **specific function** linked to the **maintenance of the operating system**.

Examples include:

- Compression

Operating systems provide utilities that enable files to be compressed and decompressed. This is used when compressing large files to be transmitted across the Internet and is commonly used to compress scanned files.

Synoptic Link

Compression techniques are explained in detail in 1.3.

- Disk defragmentation

As the hard disk becomes full, read/write times slow down. This is because files become fragmented as they are stored in different parts of memory. The disk defragmenter utility **rearranges the contents of the hard drive** so they can be accessed faster, thus improving performance.

- Antivirus

Antivirus is responsible for **detecting potential threats** to the computer, alerting the user and removing these threats.



- Automatic updating

This utility ensures the operating system is kept up to date, with any updates being automatically installed when the computer is restarted. Updates tackle bugs or security flaws so this ensures the system is less vulnerable to malware and hacking threats.

- Backup

The backup utility automatically creates routine copies of specific files selected by the user. How often files are backed up is also specified by the user. This means that in the event of a power failure, malicious attack or other accident, files can be recovered.

Open source vs closed source

Source code is written by a programmer and refers to **object code before it has been compiled**. When software is described to be 'open source' or 'closed source', this refers to whether or not the source code is accessible to the public.

	Open source	Closed Source
Definition	Open source code can be used by anyone without a license and is distributed with the source code .	Closed source code requires the user to hold an appropriate license to use it. Users cannot access the source code as the company owns the copyright license .
Advantages	Can be modified and improved by anyone	Thorough, regular and well-tested updates
	Technical support from online community	Company owning software provides expert support and user manuals.
	Can be modified and sold on	High levels of security as developed professionally.
Disadvantages	Support available online may be insufficient or incorrect. No user manuals.	License restricts how many people can use the software at once
	Lower security as may not be developed in a controlled environment	Users cannot modify and improve software themselves



Whether a user chooses to use open source or closed source software ultimately depends on the **suitability of the software to the task they will be using it for**. The user must also consider:

- Costs - *implementation, maintenance, training of staff, license*
- Functionality - *features available, ease of use*

Translators

A translator is a program that **converts high-level source code into low-level object code**, which is then ready to be executed by a computer. There are three types of translator that convert different types of code and work in different ways.

Compiler

Compilers translate high-level code into machine code **all at once**, after carrying out a number of checks and reporting back any errors. This **initial compilation process is longer** than using an interpreter or an assembler. If changes need to be made, the whole program must be recompiled.

Once code has been compiled to produce machine code, it can only be executed on certain devices - compiled code is **specific to a particular processor type and operating system**. Code can be run **without a translator** being present.

Interpreter

Interpreters **translate and execute code line-by-line**. They stop and produce an error if a line contains an error. They may **initially appear faster** than compilers as code is instantly executed, but are **slower than running compiled code** as **code must be translated each time it is executed** with an interpreter.

This feature makes interpreters useful for **testing** sections of code and pinpointing errors, as time is not wasted compiling the entire program before it has been fully debugged. Interpreted code **requires an interpreter in order to run** on different devices. However, code **can be executed on a range of platforms** as long as the right interpreter is available, thus making interpreted code **more portable**.

High-level code

Code that is written and understood by the programmer but not the computer. Low-level code can be executed by a computer but cannot be directly understood.

Note

Machine code is the same as object code.

Synoptic Link

Compilers are also used to generate **intermediate code** which you will have come across in 1.2.1.



Assembler

Assembly Code

Assembly code is considered to be a low-level language as it is the 'next level up' from machine code. Assembly code is platform specific, as the instructions used are dependent on the instruction set of the processor.

Synoptic Link

LMC is an example of intermediate code, discussed further in 1.2.4.

Assemblers translate assembly code into machine code.

Each line of assembly code is equivalent to almost one line of machine code so code is translated on almost a one-to-one basis.

Stages of compilation

When a compiler is used, high-level code goes through four stages before it is turned into object code that is ready to be executed.

Lexical Analysis

In the first stage of compilation, whitespace and comments are removed from the code. The code below...

```
while    flag = False:
    print "not found";
#terminates when item is found
```

Is translated into...

```
while flag =False:
    print"not found";
```

The remaining code is analysed for keywords and names of variables and constants. These are replaced with tokens and information about the token associated with each keyword or identifier is stored in a symbol table.

Syntax Analysis

In this stage, tokens are analysed against the grammar and rules of the programming language. Any tokens that break the rules of the programming language are flagged up as syntax errors and added to a list of errors.

Parsing

The process used to check each line of code is well-formed.



Examples of syntax errors: *undeclared variable type, incomplete set of brackets*.

An **abstract syntax tree is produced**, which is a representation of the source code in the form of a tree. Further detail about identifiers is also added to the symbol table.

Semantic analysis is also carried out at the syntax analysis stage, where logic mistakes within the program are detected.

Examples of semantic errors: *multiple declaration, undeclared identifiers*

Code Generation

The abstract syntax tree produced in the syntax analysis stage is used to produce machine code.

Optimisation

This stage of compilation searches through the code for areas it could be made more efficient. The aim of optimisation is to **make the code faster to execute** although this stage can significantly **add to the overall time taken for compilation**.

Insignificant, **redundant parts of code are detected and removed**. Repeated sections of code may be grouped and replaced with a more efficient piece of code which produces the same result. There is a danger, however, that excessive optimisation may alter the way in which the program behaves.

Linkers, Loaders and Use of Libraries

Most programs use external pieces of code within them, including subroutines and libraries from outside sources.

Linkers

This is a piece of software that is responsible for **linking external modules and libraries included within the code**. There are two types of linker:

Static

Modules and libraries are **added directly** into the main file. This **increases the size of the file**. Any updates to modules and libraries externally will not affect the program. This means a specific version of a library can be used.

Dynamic

Addresses of modules and libraries are included in the file where they are referenced. When the program is run, the loader retrieves the program at the specified address so it can be executed. The advantage here is that **files remain small** and **external updates feed through to the main file**; there is no need to rewrite the code.



Loaders

Loaders are programs provided by the operating system. When a file is executed, the loader retrieves the library or subroutine from the given memory location.

Use of Libraries

Libraries are **pre-compiled programs** which can be incorporated within other programs using either static or dynamic linking. They are **ready-to-use and error free**, so **save time** developing and testing modules. Another advantage of libraries is that they **can be reused** within multiple programs.

Libraries are often used to provide a specialised range of functions which would otherwise require a lot of time and effort to develop, so **save programmers from having to 'reinvent the wheel'** and instead make use of others' expertise. Popular libraries provide mathematical and graphical functions.

